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Czech Republic's Barbora Krejcikova celebrates after winning the French Open women's title on Saturday | AFP

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TWO GREATS PARRY IN PARIS, SET, MATCH & EVERY POINT

World No 1 Novak Djokovic beats Rafael Nadal 3-6, 6-3, 7-6, 6-2 in one of the most exquisite semi-finals at French Open

DJOKOVIC 'ON TOP OF MOUNT EVEREST'

Nadal did lead the first set but by the time it was done, the Serb had got a solid opening into Friday's match. Forget who you support. The 90-minute third set is reserved for eternity where two of the sport's greatest pushed each other their limits. Djokovic's words aptly describes the match, "You have to kind of climb Mt Everest to win against this guy," he later said

NEW CZECH-IN: WOMEN'S CHAMP BARBORA

- Barbora Krejcikova wins maiden Grand Slam title at French Open beating Russia's Anastasia Pavlyuchenkova 6-1, 2-6, 6-4
- The World No 33 becomes the first woman from Czech Republic to win a Grand Slam title in 40 years
- MEN'S FINAL: Djokovic vs Tsitsipas at 6.30pm (SUNDAY) | P11

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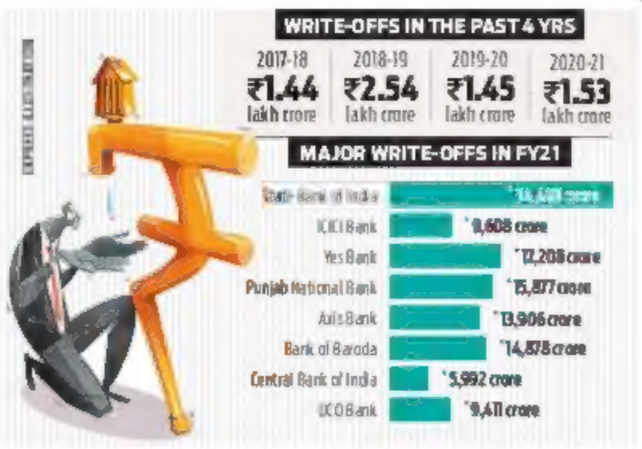
NUMBER OF GRAND SLAM TITLES DJOKOVIC HAS WON

CHENNAI • MADURAI • VIJAYAWADA • BENGALURU • KOCHI • HYDERABAD • VISAKHAPATNAM • COIMBATORE • KOZHIKODE • THIRUVANANTHAPURAM • BELAGAVI • BHUBANESWAR • SHIVAMOGGA • MANGALURU • TIRUPATI • TRICHY • TIRUNELVELI • SAMBALPUR • HUBBALLI • DHARWAPURI • KOTTAYAM • KANNUR • VILLUPURAM • KOLLAM • WARANGAL • TADEPALLIGUDEM • NAGAPATTINAM • THRISSUR • KALABURAGI


WRITE-OFFS IN THE PAST 4 YRS
2017-18 ₹1.44 lakh crore
2018-19 ₹2.54 lakh crore
2019-20 ₹1.45 lakh crore
2020-21 ₹1.53 lakh crore
MAJOR WRITE-OFFS IN FY21
State Bank of India ₹34,403 crore
ICICI Bank ₹9,608 crore
Yes Bank ₹17,208 crore
Punjab National Bank ₹15,877 crore
Axis Bank ₹13,906 crore
Bank of Baroda ₹14,878 crore
Central Bank of India ₹5,992 crore
UCO Bank ₹9,411 crore

Banks write off ₹1.53L cr to make books look good

SESA SEN @ New Delhi

INDIAN banks wrote off loans worth ₹1.53 lakh crore in 2020-21 to show low non-performing assets (NPAs) in their books, an analysis of the numbers released by individual banks show. This is the second-highest amount being written off in a single financial year in the past decade. The highest write-off was in 2018-19 at ₹2.54 lakh crore.

What is worrisome is that loans that have remained bad for years have been erased from the balance sheet of banks at the stroke of a pen. Corporate houses are among the biggest defaulters.

Write-offs were high during Q4 of FY21 comprising 55.65% of total NPA written off in the year. Banks were sitting on ₹1.2-1.4 lakh crore worth unrecognised bad loans as of December 2020, which were identified after the Supreme Court lifted the ban on NPA classification.

Yes Bank saw the sharpest surge in write-offs at ₹17,208 crore in FY21, followed by PNB (₹15,877 crore), Bank of Baroda (₹14,878 crore), Axis Bank (₹13,906 crore), ICICI Bank (₹9,608 crore), and Central Bank (₹5,992 crore).

SBI wrote off ₹34,403 crore worth of bad loans in FY21, though it was lower than the previous year's ₹52,387 crore.

Meanwhile, Punjab & Sind Bank managed to reduce write-offs by an impressive 96% to ₹70.51 crore in FY21 from ₹1,781 crore a year ago.

Care Ratings' chief economist Madan Sabnavis said gross NPAs shot up 43.7% from ₹7.1 lakh crore in March 2017 to ₹10.2 lakh crore in March 2018. After FY18, the NPAs witnessed moderation and reached ₹8.9 lakh crore by March 2020 driven by write-offs and lower slippages. Over the last couple of years, public sector banks registered substantial contraction in their gross NPAs and they are expected to be around ₹6 lakh crore by March 2021.

No tax on black fungus medicine; levy on several Covid essentials slashed; vaccine to be continued to be taxed at 5%

GST Council offers Covid relief

ANURADHA SHUKLA @ New Delhi

THE GST Council on Saturday decided to maintain status quo on tax on Covid-19 vaccines, which will continue to be taxed at 5%.

However, the Council, which met via video-conferencing to discuss the recommendation by the Group of Ministers (GoM) on essential Covid supplies, slashed rates on medical grade oxygen, Covid testing kits, hand sanitiser and other items used in Covid-19 relief and management till September 30.

"Five per cent GST on vaccines continues. The Centre will buy 75% of vaccines as announced earlier and will also pay its GST. However, 70% of income from GST will be shared with states," Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman told media after the GST Council meet.

The FM explained that the existing 5% GST on vaccines will not be a burden on users as the Centre is paying for 75% of the vaccines which are given to citizens free of cost. However, those who go to private hospitals for vaccination will have to bear the cost of GST. The Council also removed the 5% tax on black fungus medicine Amphotericin B. Also, the rate on Covid drug Remdesivir has been lowered from 12% to 5%. The Council said more medicine will be added if it is recommended by the health department.

Sitharaman added that the tax cuts are valid till September 30 this year as against August-end recommended by the GoM. The timeline may be extended, if required.

However, the Council decided against cutting tax on RT-PCR machines, RNA extraction machines, and genome sequencing machines. These items currently attract 18% GST. In the last GST Council meeting the finance minister announced a GoM headed by Meghalaya Deputy Chief Minister Conrad Sangma to examine whether any GST concessions or exemptions should be given on Covid-relief items. The GoM gave its recommendations on Tuesday and after that a single agenda meeting was called.

RATES CUT

From 5% to 0%
- Tocilizumab
- Amphotericin B

From 12% to 5%
- Anti-coagulants like Heparin
- Remdesivir
- Medical grade oxygen
- Oxygen concentrator
- Ventilator, ventilator mask / helmet
- BiPAP machine
- High flow nasal canula device
- Covid testing kits
- Pulse oximeters

From 18% to 5%
- Hand sanitizer
- Temperature check equipment
- Gas/Electric/other furnaces for crematorium

From 28% to 12%
- Ambulances

The Centre is purchasing 75 pc and is paying GST also. But the impact of this GST on people will be nil since people would be getting vaccines free of cost at government hospitals. Centre is purchasing and it is given free to people

Nirmala Sitharaman, Union Finance Minister

Bommai's suggestion on GST accepted

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Bengaluru

HOME Minister **Basavraj Bommai**, who is deputing for Chief Minister BS Yediyurappa in the GST Council, welcomed the recommendations of the Group of Ministers.

Bommai urged Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman to consider reducing GST on temperature-checking equipment from 18 per cent to 5 percent, gas electric and other furnaces for cremation from 18 per cent to 5 per cent and ambulances from 28 per cent to 12 per cent.

Sitharaman agreed to these suggestions and the GST Council approved them.

The Council agreed to extend the GST concessions up to September 30, 2021.

Bommai also sought a meeting to discuss GST compensation-related issues beyond 2022, and Sitharaman said that the GST Council will meet shortly.

Bommai thanked Sitharaman and the Union Government for approving the GST compensation loan of Rs 18,109 crore for financial year 2021-22 to the state and said that this will help in Karnataka's fight against the Covid pandemic.

SAD eyes revival, BSP foothold with Punjab pact

HARPREET BAJWA @ Chandigarh

THE Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) and Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) on Thursday announced that they would contest the 2022 Punjab Assembly election as allies.

The alliance comes at a crucial time for both the parties, with the SAD seeking to regain lost ground amid backlash over sacrilege case and its initial support to the Centre's agri laws, and the BSP attempting to stay relevant on the national scene at a time it is facing existential crisis in its traditional stronghold, Uttar Pradesh, which also goes to the polls next year.

The announcement was made jointly by SAD president Sukhbir Singh Badal and BSP national general secretary S C Mishra, with the former calling it a 'historic day' in Punjab politics.

Badal said the BSP will get 20 seats scattered across Malwa, Magha and Doaba regions, while SAD will contest from 97 in a house of 117. While announcing the decision, Mishra called upon the Dalits to support the alliance.

Expert panel to revamp edu system, says Suresh

RAMU PATIL @ Bengaluru

TO ensure quality education to children in the wake of the pandemic, the Education Department has constituted an expert committee to reform the education system. Primary and Secondary Education Minister S Suresh Kumar said that there is a need for holistic thinking to improve the education system and not just focus on classes and examinations.

"The committee will look at all aspects to ensure good learning. It includes access to tech devices in rural areas and continuous assessment of students. The committee consists of experts from NIMHANS, child specialists, doctors and representatives from educational institutions. They will look at the future of education," he said. The process has already started and some meetings have also been held, he added. On the government's decision to hold SSLC examinations, he said there is a need to instil confidence among children and not create panic. He minister said that there is a need to take all precautions and also teach children about it.

FULL INTERVIEW: P3

KARNATAKA

LOGS 9,785 CASES IN 1 DAY

Active Covid-19 cases in Karnataka were less than two lakh on Saturday, even as the state reported 144 fatalities, taking the total caseload to 27.57 lakh and toll to 32,788 | P6

GETTING BACK ON TRACK

A day after the State Government announced a few relaxations in lockdown norms, passengers arrive at the Krantivira Sangolli Rayanna Railway Station, in Bengaluru on Saturday | VINOD KUMAR T

EXPRES READ

Dominica HC denies bail to Choksi

New Delhi: The Dominica High Court has denied bail to fugitive diamantaire Mehul Choksi in the case of illegal entry into the Caribbean country after his mysterious disappearance from neighbouring Antigua and Barbuda, where he is staying as a citizen since 2018, local Caribbean media reported on saturday.

4 killed in terrorist firing in J&K

Srinagar: Two policemen posted for enforcing Covid restrictions and two civilians were killed on Saturday when Lashker-e-Taiba terrorists carried out a deadly strike in Sopore in North Kashmir, an incident which drew widespread condemnation from across the political spectrum.

Saffron touch? Proposed Sh'mogga airport terminal resembles lotus

MARX TEJASWI @ Shivamogga

IF you ever happen to fly over Shivamogga once the construction of the airport is completed at Sogane near the city, don't be surprised if the terminal building of the airport looks like a lotus, the party symbol of the BJP and India's national flower.

The architecture of this public utility building is significant as top leaders – Chief Minister BS Yediyurappa, RSS chief Dattatreya Hosabale and BJP national general secretary BL Santhosh – are either from the district or have strong links with it. Yediyurappa's pocket borough is Shikaripur, Hosabale's place of origin is Soraba and Santhosh has worked in the district for a long time promoting RSS ideology. RDPR Minister KS Eshwarappa and former Assembly Speaker DH Shankaramurthy, who is with the BJP, too are from the district.

When a 3D blueprint of the project was released in front of the chief minister during his inspection at Sogane on Saturday, the video gave a clear picture of the proposed state-of-the-art airport. However, an aerial view of the terminal building resembled a lotus.

Sampath, an executive engineer (special division) of PWD in Shivamogga, told *TNSE* that the design was unveiled for the first time on Saturday and it is almost finalised.

Chief Minister BS Yediyurappa has promised it would be the second biggest airport after Kempegowda International Airport in Bengaluru. It is being constructed at an initial cost ₹384 crore.

An artist's impression of the aerial view of the Shivamogga airport terminal.

CONNECTIVITY WOES

Techies, students struggle with poor Net link

ASHWINI M SRIPAD & K SHIVA KUMAR @ Bengaluru, Mysuru

WORK from home and online classes could be an enjoyable and relaxed way of working and pursuing one's education. But it is not exactly a boon for everyone. There are hundreds, if not thousands, of professionals and students across the state who are struggling without internet and phone connectivity.

Every day at Varamballi in Hosanagara taluk of Shivamogga district, techie Sindhu N leaves her home carrying her laptop, a lightweight table and chair, and walks one kilometre to her farm where she works under a hut covered in a polythene sheet. This is her cubicle as this is the only place in the village where she gets some internet connection.

She leaves home at 9.15 am to reach her "work station" by 9.30 am. In the afternoon, she comes back home to charge her laptop and return to her hut. She does this six days a week.

Sindhu N at work on her laptop in the hut, in Varamballi | EXPRESS

Sindhu, a techie working with a private firm in Bengaluru, moved to her village in March 2020 when the first lockdown was announced. It has been more than 15 months and her struggle continues.

Initially, she travelled to her uncle's house in Hosanagara taluk which is 8 km away. There, too, she would get signals only intermittently. Later she started going to Sonale, where her brother stayed and which is some 5 km from her village. But when the Lockdown 2 was announced, she could not travel. P3

CID unearths ₹290 cr Chinese app scandal

CHETANA BELAGERE @ Bengaluru

THE Cyber Crime Division of CID in Karnataka has busted a major money laundering scam involving over Rs 290 crore. The sleuths have arrested nine people, including four foreign nationals.

CID sleuths said the team received a complaint from RazorPay Software, alleging the accused were availing payment solutions from the company by saying they are running a business in gaming, social and e-commerce categories. They defrauded the company by deviating from their original category of business and started routing their financial transactions through a business entity named "Powerbank", an app listed on Google Play Store.

The app promoters promise a return of 5-10 per cent interest per month on the invested amount and even pay small amounts initially. P5